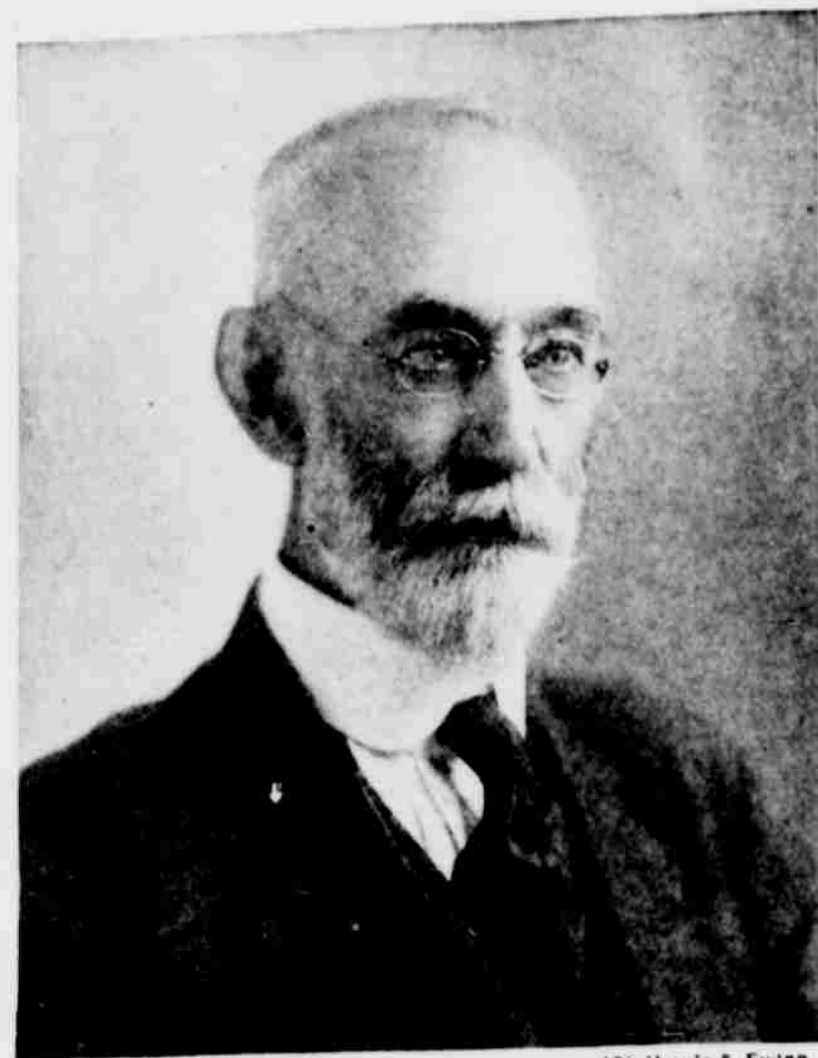


Demands Recognition for the Modern Farmer

By PROF. THOMAS C. ATKESON

OF THE NATIONAL GRANGE, AND A DELEGATE TO THE NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL CONFERENCE

IN THE National Industrial Conference convened at Washington in October by President Wilson "for the purpose of reaching, if possible, some common ground of agreement and action with regard to the future conduct of industry" and "for the purpose of enabling us to work out if possible in a genuine spirit of cooperation a practical method of association based upon a real community of interests which will rebound to the welfare of all our people," there were five delegates representing the agricultural interests seated on the floor of the conference, three in the Employer group and two in the Public group. These five presented to the conference "a statement of principles affecting Agriculture in its relation to other industries," and with this as a text, Mr. Atkeson has taken the problems of Agriculture, and the acceptable solution, for discussion in this article.



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DISCUSSING intelligently the farm problem of this country one must classify, separate, and take up individually the many ramifications that go to make up conditions as they exist. We must remember to deal with the farmer not only as a laborer, but as an employer; we must remember his duties and obligations; we must not forget the paramount question of production; we should deal with the marketing situation, the storage problem, organization, and the financing of the farmer. All these must be considered, all have their bearing on conditions not only as they exist but on the future of the farmer, and the future of the country, as well.

There must be the same economic, social and political justice which will make farming as profitable and as livable as any other occupation involving the same amount of hard work, business ability and investment, or the balance between the production of farming and consumption cannot be maintained. From the standpoint of capital, farming is easily the largest business, and from the standpoint of labor there is no other industry that includes within its activities nearly as many laborers, yet through an unfortunate technical meaning, in many minds agriculture is excluded from either Capital or Labor. And it becomes necessary to correct this situation, that remedial conditions when worked out shall recognize the farmers as laborers and the farm owners as capitalists.

Specialization in modern farming has been brought about through the necessity of responding to the ever increasing demands of modern industrial and economic developments. The farm is no longer a self-sustaining unit, and its operation requires the highest technical skill and managerial ability with tremendous investments in modern labor-saving machinery. Six million farms form America's greatest industry, agriculture, and whether this country shall continue to go about its many other businesses rests with the uninterrupted operation of these six million farms, on which depends the daily supply of food of all the people.

The farmers of this country employ more laborers than any other single industry. The daily manual labor of operating farmers in this country is equivalent to that of 13,000,000 adult workers. The number of operating farmers and their workers is greater than that of laborers in all other industries combined. And so that the adjustment of wage disputes may be fundamentally sound it should never be forgotten that there is an intimate relation between wages on the farms and in other industries. Higher wages on the farm in-

evitably means higher prices for farm products. And with high wages in other industries we find that condition obtains, too, on the farms, for the solidarity of labor is such that farmers cannot continue on one wage level while the rest of labor is on another level. Workers will not remain on the farms if they can obtain more money elsewhere. And so of necessity the farm owner must meet the wages of labor in the city, and with that is born higher prices of foodstuffs.

It is a circle, a vicious circle that the country is traveling, and the signposts around the circle read: "I'll get all I can." But there are other signs; these are not read for the pace is too swift; on them are lettered: "The more you get, the more it will cost you to live." And yet everyone cries out against the high cost of living.

At the same time it must be recognized that much of the complaint of the cost of living is the result of extravagant living. The cost of living, of course, is high or low as the price of necessities of life rise above or fall below the general level of salaries, wages, and income. The present cost is not due so much to the prices received by the farmers as it is to the utter wastefulness brought about by the abnormal wages paid during the war, when war necessity drove the government and employer working on government contracts to give the sums demanded that the troops in France might lack nothing with which to inflict defeat upon the enemy. A recent comparison between farm prices, food prices, and wage levels, and reliable government statements, are most favorable to the contention that the farmers are not receiving the percentage of the final cost of foodstuffs to which they are entitled.

Agricultural costs or income cannot be based satisfactorily on either the day or the week as a unit. Conditions are so variable that it is difficult to prescribe a rule applicable to all localities or any locality at all seasons. This fact, however, must be recognized: It is becoming increasingly difficult for farmers to obtain labor willing to work more hours than labor in other industries. All in all, it is shown that the hours of farm labor approximate the hours of labor prescribed for other industries, but the nature of agricultural work is such that it cannot economically adjust itself to a specific hour day. If, however, other industries agree upon a basic day that basic day without question will be the unit of all estimates in farm production costs.

One of the great problems to be taken up by the government is the necessity of remedial legislation that the farmers may co-operate in their marketing.

Economic and industrial conditions necessitate this. There are legal obstacles now existing and handicapping such effort and these should be swept away to preserve to the farmers the right of marketing their products through a co-operative system, which not only will insure a great economy in handling but will have a corresponding effect on the living costs.

Just as co-operation in marketing the products of the fields is needed, so are strong farmers' organizations essential to the welfare of the industry. Leadership must be developed among the ranks of the farmers and in accord with their best interests, and these leaders must be such that they will be in a position to represent the industry in its contact with other industries and with the public. Economic efficiency in agriculture is promoted by every agency which adds to the knowledge, experience, satisfaction, technique and equipment of farmers. Therefore the necessity of organization.

With the effecting of such organizations it is to be hoped that adequate food storage reservoirs, whose need is so manifest, may come into being, for in time of heaviest production foods should be stored away in such quantities as will tide over periods of non-production. Properly regulated storage by farmers of essential reserves of food should be encouraged.

The financing of agriculture is a matter with which the public should be concerned. Extension of federal credit through the land banks will reduce the cost of the capital needed in agriculture and should be made easier of access to all farmers. I feel, too, that associated credits of farm communities should be developed under proper regulations and leadership.

The foregoing I believe are not only vital to agriculture as the largest single industry of the country but vital to the welfare of all. The representatives of Agriculture believe that Capital, Labor and Agriculture must have equal rights and must be entitled to equal treatment. Farmers through their organizations are endeavoring to obtain for agriculture its proper field of influence that all may be subjected to the welfare of the whole. The farmers of this country demand that Capital and Labor shall not continue and make more unbearable the economic conditions which have caused the decline in Agriculture, and threaten a further decline that menaces the future of all.

There must be a common ground upon which all may meet, that benefits for all may be developed and awarded without favor, without fear, which condition recognizes a finer, truer democracy than that which has and is existing.

After-War Conditions in Roumania

ROUMANIA, richest spot in Europe, overrun by Mackensen's German armies during the war, is having great difficulty in returning to normal activities. Official statements received in Washington indicate. Heroic measures are, however, having their effect, and but for the great lack of transportation, the handicaps under which the Roumanians are struggling would in large degree be overcome. Thousands upon thousands of cars, freight and passenger, were stolen by the enemy during his occupation of Roumania, and in a recent article on the situation in that country, the writer, who had traversed both Hungary and Roumania, stated that the bulk of this rolling stock could be seen on side trackage in Hungary. It is known, too, that the Roumanians of Budapest used their military forces to start back toward their own country a large percentage of the cars then held by the Hungarians.

It is stated in the reports received in Washington that merchandise of all descriptions is needed, and that already French goods may be noted in the Bucharest shop windows. Difficulties in communication are having serious effects, as are government regulations providing against the removal from the country money used in the purchase of goods. This, of course, necessitates the seller furnishing extended credit, or resting content with having the money deposited in Roumanian banks.

"The American merchant," says one official statement, "coming to Roumania with goods to sell, as some

have, is confronted with another difficulty. Finding it impossible to take payment for his merchandise away with him, he wishes to communicate with his principals for instructions or advice, but on account of delays in communicating he must send his telegrams to Paris by post to be relayed to the United States—if he is so fortunate to have a representative in Paris to do this for him—or he must go himself. Telegrams can be sent, but the confirmations arrive by post so often before the telegrams that even official telegrams are regularly sent by post, a matter of six days to Paris or more, without counting delays by the censor. French and British merchants have the considerable advantage of being much nearer their headquarters, but it must be said that they are subject to all the other difficulties that Americans are.

The rate of exchange now is declared prohibitive, but there is optimism among conservative business people as to the value of the lei, the native coin, this optimism being based on the hopes of an early exportation of grain, petroleum, and timber, the country's chief products. The lack of sufficient means of transportation and the present high cost of labor may modify this to a certain extent, but there is no doubt of the country's potential wealth, very considerably increased by recent additions of territory and population including some of the richest portions of Europe.

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce declares that the one great need of the country is railway ma-

terial. A certain amount of machinery is required and British manufacturers have realized the need and have begun to supply the wants.

"The peasantry," says one statement, "seems fairly normally clothed. Their clothing is produced locally from cloth also produced locally to some extent, and also from cottons imported. In the opinion of competent people in Roumania the present year's crops of cereals will be sufficient to cover the needs of the population, and there seems a slight possibility that grain will be available for export. There seems no need for any further distribution of food or clothing in Roumania in the form of relief. With good harvests the country will be on a fair way to recovery within a few months."

There is little likelihood of Bolshevism taking root in the country. Not only are the Roumanian farmers ardent Nationalists, but the apportionment of territory, Bessarabia and Transylvania, from Russia and Hungary, respectively, and the satisfying of the national aspirations of that country for a "Greater Roumania" seem to have been effectual in supplying a strong bulwark against Bolshevik propaganda from Russia gaining footholds in countries to the west.

The Roumanian army is in a far better state of discipline than when that country entered the war, for it has been outfitted and officered largely by French veterans and its earlier defeats seem not to have broken down its morale.